

CLAIMS

The invention is claimed as follows:

1. A method of identifying a plurality of alternate travel itineraries, the method comprising the steps of:
 - 5 receiving a set of flexible travel requirements;
 - determining all pairs of departure and return dates that satisfy the flexible travel requirements;
 - identifying and displaying fares for itineraries corresponding to each of the departure and return date pairs.
- 10 2. The method of claim 1 wherein the itineraries are air travel itineraries.
3. The method of claim 1 wherein the set of flexible travel requirements comprises a date interval during which a weekend trip is desired.
- 15 4. The method of claim 3 wherein a weekend trip is defined as a Thursday, Friday or Saturday departure and a Sunday, Monday or Tuesday return.
5. The method of claim 4 wherein the step of determining all pairs of departure and return dates comprises identifying all weekends that occur during the
20 date interval, and pairing each possible departure date associated with each possible return date for the corresponding weekend for each weekend that occurs within the date interval.
- 25 6. The method of claim 5 wherein the date interval comprises a calendar month.
7. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of receiving a set of flexible travel requirements comprises receiving a desired departure date and a desired return
30 date and receiving at least one of a specified number of days preceding said desired departure date, a specified number of days following said departure date; a specified

number of days preceding said desired return date, and a specified number of days following said desired return date.

8. The method of claim 7 wherein the step of determining all pairs of
5 departure and return dates satisfying said flexible travel requirements comprises identifying all possible departure dates based on the desired departure date and the specified number of acceptable days preceding the desired departure date and the number of acceptable travel days following said desired departure date; identifying all
10 possible return dates based on the desired return date and the specified number of acceptable travel days preceding the desired return date and the number of acceptable travel days following the desired return date; and pairing each possible departure date with each possible return date.

9. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of receiving a set of flexible
15 travel requirements comprises receiving a date interval and a trip length.

10. The method of claim 9 wherein said date interval is a first date and a second date.

20 11. The method of claim 9 wherein said trip length is expressed as a numerical value or a numerical range setting forth the desired length of the trip in days.

12. The method of claim 9, wherein the step of identifying all pairs of
25 departure and return dates that satisfy the flexible travel requirements comprises determining all possible departure dates and all return dates within the date interval that encompasses a trip of the received trip length.

13. A method of searching for travel itineraries comprising the steps of:
identifying one or more departure dates and one or more return dates, where at least one of said one or more departure date and said one or more return dates comprises a plurality of dates;
- 5 identifying a plurality of date pairs each date pair comprising one of said one or more departure dates and one of said one or more return dates;
searching for fares for itineraries corresponding to each date pair; and
displaying said fares.
- 10 14. The method of claim 13 wherein the step of identifying one or more departure dates and one or more return dates further comprises identifying every weekend within a defined date range, and identifying at least one departure date and at least one return date for each weekend.
- 15 15. The method of claim 13 wherein identifying at least one departure date for each weekend comprises identifying a date corresponding to at least one of Thursday, Friday and Saturday of each weekend within said defined date range and identifying at least one return date comprises identifying a date corresponding to at least one of Sunday, Monday and Tuesday of each weekend within said defined date
- 20 range.
16. The method of claim 13 wherein said defined date range is a calendar month.
- 25 17. The method of claim 13 wherein the step of identifying one or more departure dates and one or more return dates includes receiving a specified departure date and a range of days preceding and/or following said specified departure date.
18. The method of claim 13 wherein the step of identifying one or more
- 30 departure dates and one or more return dates includes receiving a specified return date and a range of days preceding and/or following said specified return date.

19. The method of claim 13 wherein the step of identifying one or more departure dates and one or more return dates includes receiving a range of dates and receiving a specified trip length, wherein the at least one departure date is identified as every date within said date range which can accommodate a trip of the specified trip length within said date range.

20. The method of claim 13 wherein the step of identifying one or more departure dates and one or more departure dates and one or more return dates includes receiving a range of dates and receiving a specified trip length, wherein the at least one return date is identified as every date within said date range which can accommodate a trip of the specified trip length within said date range.

21. A method of displaying fares for a plurality of travel itineraries having alternative travel dates, the method comprising the steps of:
creating a matrix of rows and columns;
defining date pairs at the intersections of the rows and columns;
listing fares at the intersections of the rows and columns, the fares corresponding to itineraries that include departure and return dates corresponding to the date pair defined by the row and column in which the fare is listed.

22. The method of claim 21 wherein said matrix is adapted to display itineraries for weekend trips within a specified time period.

23. The method of claim 22 wherein departure dates are listed along a first axis of said matrix, return days are listed along a second axis, and return dates are listed within said columns and grouped by weekend such that each departure date listed along the first axis is paired with a return date corresponding to each day listed along the second axis said departure date and return date pairs spanning a single weekend.

24. The method according to claim 21 wherein the matrix is adapted to display itineraries based around specified departure and return dates and a specified number of days around said specified departure and return dates.

5 25. The method of claim 24 wherein departure dates are listed along a first axis of the matrix, and return dates are listed along a second axis of the matrix.

26. The method of claim 21 wherein the matrix is adapted to display itineraries of a specified length within a specified date range.

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27. The method of claim 26 wherein a plurality of departure dates are listed along a first axis and a plurality of different trip lengths are displayed along a second axis, return dates are listed at the intersections of the matrix rows and columns such that each return date corresponds to a trip of length equal to the trip length and a
15 departure date equal to the departure date defined by the position of the return date with the matrix.

28. The method of claim 21 further comprising the step of highlighting a fare and each date of a date pair associated with said fare when a user points to said
20 fare.

29. A system for searching for and displaying travel itineraries and fares for flexible travel schedules, comprising:

means for receiving a set of flexible travel requirements;
25 means for determining all pairs of departure and return dates that satisfy the flexible travel requirements;
search means for identifying itineraries corresponding to said date pairs.